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Texas Indigent Defense Commission Approves Over \$7 Million in New Grant Awards to Strengthen Public Defense Across Texas

AUSTIN, TX — On Friday, June 27, the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) approved more than \$7 million in grant funding to support the establishment and expansion of public defender offices across Texas, along with other projects aimed at enhancing public defense. These grant awards further TIDC’s mission to strengthen public defense statewide, with a particular focus on increasing access to quality legal representation in rural counties with increasingly fewer attorneys. The approved grants will help fill critical gaps in attorney availability, improving quality of representation and creating long-term infrastructure for indigent defense.

The Commission approved key grant awards, including:

- \$2.2 million to Wharton County to establish the Wharton–Matagorda Regional Public Defender Office, addressing a shortage of qualified defense attorneys and fulfilling a legislative mandate.
- \$1.6 million to Culberson County to expand the Far West Texas Regional Public Defender Office into Val Verde and Terrell Counties.
- \$1.4 million to Maverick County to create a new tri-county public defender office serving Maverick, Dimmit, and Zavala Counties, filling long-documented gaps in representation and bringing in more qualified attorneys to the region to represent indigent defendants.
- \$293,334 to Harris County to administer the Future Indigent Defense Leaders (FIDL) program, a multi-year statewide training and mentorship initiative aimed at preparing the next generation of indigent defense attorneys across Texas.
- \$1.2 million to Brazos County to expand its public defender office.

Formula Grant funding was restored to pre-shortfall levels, with the Commission approving an increase of the FY2025 Formula Grant Award budget from \$17 million to \$20.5 million, supported by recent supplemental legislative appropriations.

Also, the Commission approved the issuance of a new Request for Applications (RFA) to distribute \$10 million over the next two years to existing rural programs for one-time and temporary assistance. The Legislature authorized TIDC to use unspent Operation Lone Star funds from the current budget for this purpose.

“These grant awards reflect TIDC’s continued focus on expanding rural public defense infrastructure where it’s needed most,” said Nueces County District Judge Missy Medary, TIDC Board Chair and Presiding Judge of the 5th Administrative Judicial Region.

“By supporting local innovation and expanding regional capacity, we are helping counties protect defendants’ constitutional right to counsel, while building more effective public defense systems statewide to address the attorney shortage crisis now and into the future,” said Scott Ehlers, Executive Director of TIDC.

About TIDC

The Texas Indigent Defense Commission funds, oversees, and improves indigent defense in each of the State’s 254 counties. TIDC is led by 13 commission members and 20 staff. To learn more, visit www.tidc.texas.gov.